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# The Poverty of Bureaucracy: New Left Theory and Practice in the Canadian Labour Movement during the 1960s and 1970s

## **Cover Page Footnote**

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# THE POVERTY OF BUREAUCRACY: NEW LEFT THEORY AND PRACTICE IN THE CANADIAN LABOUR MOVEMENT DURING THE 1960s AND 1970s

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## ABSTRACT

This essay examines the New Left's impact on the Canadian labour movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Specifically, it argues that in large industrial unions such as the UAW, New Left ideas that were popular amongst the rank and file were stifled by the more conservative labour bureaucrats. However, in public sector unions and unions unaffiliated with the Canadian Labour Congress, New Left ideas were often able to flourish, and these more radical unions were sometimes able to obtain substantial gains for their members throughout the 1970s while also fostering a broader sense of class consciousness in Canadian society — culminating most notably in the Common Front's general strikes in Quebec. Furthermore, this essay suggests that New Left ideas were more popular in public sector and independent unions because these unions had a larger proportion of women in comparison to other unions, and women at this time had a greater incentive to embrace transformative ideologies than men.

Keywords: science, federal government, policy, public, political history, labour history

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Within Canadian society, the era of the 1960s is widely recognized as a time in which young people embraced ‘counterculture’ values in opposition to the ‘establishment.’ However, it is important to recognize that this counterculture emerged not only in opposition to establishment institutions and culture, but also within institutions and social movements that were traditionally the main avenues of opposition to the capitalist liberal order. On Canadian college campuses, for example, a so-called ‘New Left’ emerged as a distinct entity from the traditionally Communist, CCF, or trade union based ‘Old Left.’ Focused around concepts of participatory democracy, anti-authoritarianism, and workers’ self-management, the New Left was an important intellectual current in 1960s Canadian society and was significant in shaping what many people now recognize as 1960s countercultural thinking.

This essay evaluates the influence that the New Left had within the Canadian labour movement in the late 1960s and 1970s. It argues that though New Left ideas and tactics contributed to increased militancy and radicalism amongst rank and file workers throughout the era, New Leftists met resistance from the more conservative labour bureaucracy in larger industrial unions such as the UAW. Conversely, public sector unions and non-Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) affiliated independent unions were often more receptive to the New Left, and these more radical unions at times obtained substantial gains for their members throughout the 1970s and fostered a broader sense of class consciousness as a result of their militancy. In addition to differences in leadership, this essay suggests New Left ideas were more popular in public sector and independent unions because these unions had a larger proportion of women in comparison to other unions, and women at this time had a greater incentive to embrace more transformative ideologies than men.

Like their British and American counterparts, the Canadian New Left was initially rooted in youth activist peace campaigns for nuclear disarmament. The most significant, yet short lived, Canadian New Left peace organization was the Student Union for Peace Action (SUPA). Though SUPA only lasted from 1965 until 1967, historians such as Bryan Palmer have observed that the larger Canadian New Left movement coalesced around, and later grew out of, this group.<sup>1</sup> In terms of their political beliefs, the New Left mainly drew upon a combination of humanist Marxism, anarchism, and anti-imperialist thought.<sup>2</sup> Influenced by thinkers such as C. Wright Mills and Herbert Marcuse, the New Left criticized not only the consumerism,

<sup>1</sup> Bryan Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 278-283.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 249-255.

alienation, and exploitation of liberal capitalist societies, but also the rigid authoritarian bureaucracies in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and also expressed solidarity with national liberation movements in the (termed at the time) Third World.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, many New Leftists saw trade unions not as a force for progressive change in society, but as “legalistic” bureaucracies complicit in maintaining the status quo.<sup>4</sup> In fact, this outlook on the labour movement led the New Left to temporarily abandon focus on the working class entirely in the mid-1960s, though efforts ally with the labour movement quickly re-emerged by the end of the decade.<sup>5</sup>

Their ardent opposition to bureaucracy and authoritarianism also led New Leftists to embrace the concepts of participatory democracy and workers’ self-management.<sup>6</sup> To New Leftists, a truly democratic and egalitarian society could only exist once workers controlled the means of production themselves and democratically self-managed their places of work, and when communities could determine their needs independent of state bureaucrats.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, New Leftists believed these tactics could make life more fulfilling and cure the alienation inherent to capitalist society.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time that New Leftists were protesting on campuses, most young Canadians were entering the workforce directly after high school.<sup>9</sup> Ian Milligan shows that these young people too, were increasingly opposed to authority as a result of having been raised on the democratic idealism of post-war North America that proliferated throughout school curriculums, mass media, and popular culture.<sup>10</sup> As these young people entered the workforce, they encountered workplaces that did not match with these ideals, and which were instead incredibly authoritarian. Like the New Leftists, these young workers had little respect for traditional authority figures whether they were bosses or union bureaucrats.<sup>11</sup> As a result, young workers entering factories and mines during this period became increasingly militant and protested these authoritarian working conditions, oftentimes without union approval, culminating in the “wildcat wave” of 1965-66.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 249-255; Philip Resnick, “The New Left in Ontario,” in *The New Left in Canada*, edited by Dimitrios Roussopoulos, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1970): 109, 110.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Thompson, “The New Left in Saskatchewan,” in *The New Left in Canada*, edited by Dimitrios Roussopoulos, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1970): 65, 69-71.

<sup>5</sup> Resnick, 108.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 109, 110.

<sup>7</sup> Resnick, 109, 110.

<sup>8</sup> Ian McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada’s Left History*, (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005), 189.

<sup>9</sup> Ian Milligan, *Rebel Youth: 1960s Labour Unrest, Young Workers, and New Leftists in English Canada*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 18

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>11</sup> Bryan Palmer, *Canada’s 1960s*, 218.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 221.

This renewed period of unrest ultimately signaled the end of the relatively peaceful post-war consensus between labour, capital, and the state, and worker militancy continued to increase well into the 1970s.<sup>13</sup>

Writing for an internal UAW publication, John Haynes' carefully observed the differences between older workers and the new generation. He wrote that young workers entering factories were distinct from the older workers who had lived through the Great Depression and who were content with negotiating decent wages for a "fair day's work."<sup>14</sup> Young workers, meanwhile, were more concerned with the very definition of a fair day's work. For instance, he gave a specific example of young cleaning workers who, rather than spacing tasks out evenly over the course of the day, wanted to finish their daily tasks as quickly as they pleased while using the rest of their work time for leisure.<sup>15</sup> The workers argued that they had been given a set amount of work, and that they should be allowed to complete this work in whatever manner that they saw fit without repercussions from management.<sup>16</sup> In addition to more control over the work process, the new generation of workers wanted more leisure time in the form of a shorter work week and less weeks of work altogether. When management confronted workers about absenteeism, the young workers would simply call in sick to protest.<sup>17</sup> Finally, Haynes noted that these issues were part of a broad resistance to bosses' authority which included talking back and smoking marijuana in the workplace.<sup>18</sup> Though this type of workplace resistance was seemingly not political, it was most definitely a radical break from the older generation of workers who by this point were worried solely about wages and materialistic gains.

Because of young workers' anti-authoritarian attitudes and their grievances over the work process, it is not surprising that New Left ideas gained a foothold amongst rank and file workers by the end of the 1960s. In one example, an observer during this period noted that young UAW workers were learning tactics from the peace movement and using these tactics to perform acts of resistance on the job.<sup>19</sup> Though he was observing American workers, this still suggests that New Leftists were influencing the wider youthful discontent within the UAW workforce at this time through both

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<sup>13</sup> Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz, *From Consent to Coercion: The Assault on Trade Union Freedoms*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 27.

<sup>14</sup> John Haynes, "The New Workers: A Report," *New Generation* 52, no. 4, (1970): No pagination. Walter Reuther Library (WRL), Douglas A. Fraser Collection, box 12, files 12-20.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Herbert J. Gens, "The Protest of Young Factory Workers," *New Generation* 52, no. 4, (1970): No pagination. WRL, Douglas A. Fraser Collection, box 12, files 12-20.

their ideology and their strategies of protest. Furthermore, in 1969, the UAW hosted a youth conference to stimulate youth involvement in union activities and so that union officials could attempt to better understand the growing disparity between the young and old generations.<sup>20</sup> Writing to Irv Bluestone at the UAW head office in Detroit, the leader of the UAW's Canadian branch, Dennis McDermott, recognized the New Left's growing influence amongst the Canadian workforce, and selected his two delegates for the conference based upon this observation. He described the first delegate as "a socialist, and an active member of the New Left," and the second as "a not so quiet revolutionary from Quebec."<sup>21</sup> McDermott had been involved with a SUPA community organizing project in preceding years, and was consequently acutely aware of the New Left's growing influence within his own union.<sup>22</sup> Because of this, Milligan notes that unlike his American counterparts who scorned the New Left, McDermott's initial approach was one of engagement and "respect" for the emerging New Leftists in the workforce, even if he did not necessarily endorse these new ideas himself.<sup>23</sup>

One can observe other direct links between the broader Canadian labour movement and New Left ideas. In March of 1970, the Woodsworth Foundation and the New Left Praxis Group sponsored a conference on industrial democracy.<sup>24</sup> The speakers included New Left academics such as Gerry Hunnius from the Praxis Group and Andre Gorz; representatives from several large unions including CUPE and the United Steelworkers of America, alongside Dennis McDermott from the UAW and David Archer, president of the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL); and NDP MPs such as Ed Broadbent.<sup>25</sup> The talks given overtly reflected the degree to which New Left ideals were being embraced in Canada's major unions. For example, Chris Trower from the United Steelworkers argued that political democracy without industrial democracy is a "sham," and that workers must gain control of their workplaces for Canada to be truly free and democratic.<sup>26</sup> He also argued for unions to gradually gain control of the work process, management process, and ownership of companies through collective bargaining, and suggested that the NDP could aid unions in this endeavor

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<sup>20</sup> Milligan, 61.

<sup>21</sup> "Letter to Irv Bluestone, from Dennis McDermott," 1969, WRL, Douglas A. Fraser Collection, box 12, files 12-20.

<sup>22</sup> Bryan Palmer, *Canada's 1960s*, 262.

<sup>23</sup> Milligan, 61-62.

<sup>24</sup> "Conference on Industrial Democracy Pamphlet," 1970, WRL, UAW Region 7 Collection, box 14, file 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Chris Trower, "Industrial Democracy: An Idle Dream or Stairway to Freedom," WRL, UAW Region 7 Collection, box 14, file 8.

through pro-labour legislation.<sup>27</sup> The fact ideas such as those from Trower's speech were being seriously engaged with by the president of the OFL says much about the popularity of New Left ideas within the Canadian labour movement at this time.

Ed Finn observed this growing call for industrial democracy in a 1971 article in *Canadian Dimension*. In many ways his article echoed much of what Haynes had said about the growing divide between younger workers and older workers, and more particularly the growing conflict between radical young workers and the more conservative labour bureaucracies.<sup>28</sup> However, unlike Haynes, Finn recognized that many of these young workers' now had transformative political demands in addition to their rebellious attitudes, and were calling specifically for industrial democracy.<sup>29</sup> The popularity of these demands is further evidenced by the fact that Finn himself (who was radical, but certainly not a New Leftist) ultimately agreed that workers must be given more control of the work process and that the workplace should be made as democratic as possible, believing that this would help put an end to the growing number of labour disputes.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, touching upon the distinctly New Left theme of alienation, Finn argued that society should make work more "rewarding and stimulating" for the modern worker.<sup>31</sup> Finn's reference to alienation highlights yet another way that New Left thinking was entering the labour movement's collective consciousness and further differentiating young workers' demands from those of the older generation.

Finn's article was also prescient because he recognized that the labour bureaucrats in Canada's largest unions did not embrace New Left thoughts as much as it might have initially appeared. Speaking a year after Finn's article in 1972, Don McDonald, head of the CLC, warned attendees at a conference in Ottawa that "advocates of workers' control want to use union workers as shock troops to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat," and this meant that "a few intellectuals would rule by telling workers what is good for them."<sup>32</sup> Additionally, Dennis McDermott, who had previously respected and engaged with New Left politics, quickly became one of the New Left's most vocal opponents within the Canadian labour movement. In 1972, McDermott along with William Mahoney and Lynn Williams from the United Steelworkers approached NDP leadership and threatened

<sup>27</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>. Ed Finn, "Bureaucratic Conservatism in the Trade Unions & the Growing Rank and File Threat," *Canadian Dimension* 8, no. 1 (1971): 29-33.

<sup>29</sup>. Ibid., 32.

<sup>30</sup>. Ibid., 33.

<sup>31</sup>. Ibid., 33.

<sup>32</sup>. Andre Beckerman, "An Organizer's Guide to Worker's Control," *Canadian Dimension* 8, no. 7, (1972): 16.



to withdraw all funding for the NDP if the New Left influenced Waffle faction were allowed to participate in the upcoming election.<sup>33</sup> The NDP subsequently expelled the Waffle members, and the movement died off soon after.<sup>34</sup> The NDP Waffle had represented perhaps the most significant opportunity for the New Left to solidify their ideas in the mainstream labour movement and to gain state power, yet were ultimately prevented in doing so by the more conservative labour bureaucrats.

While one could argue that McDermott's opposition to the Waffle might have had more to do with the Waffle's nationalist policies than their leftist idealism, McDermott cemented his reactionary conservatism by the mid-1970s when he opposed the Sudbury mineworkers' and United Postal Workers attempts to resist repressive wage controls implemented by the Liberal federal government in 1975.<sup>35</sup> Bryan Palmer notes that by this time, McDermott and many other major labour leaders fully complied with the Canadian state's reinvigorated repression of labour radicalism and militancy.<sup>36</sup> When Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau threatened to jail non-compliant union members, for example, McDermott took the side of the state rather than the militant rank and file.<sup>37</sup> Because of the unified repression from both the state and labour bureaucracy, the New Left was unable to truly leave a lasting mark on many mainstream unions, including the UAW. While leaders like McDermott might have entertained New Left theories for a time, they ultimately could not reconcile these new ideas with their entrenched top-down bureaucratic practice.

Conversely, as leaders of the UAW and the United Steelworkers were drifting increasingly rightward, public sector unions further embraced New Left radicalism and militancy. For example, Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) spokesperson Andre Beckerman presented a speech on workers' control at the Canadian Union of Postal Workers' conference on industrial democracy in Edmonton in 1972, and implored workers to negotiate for more control over work and management processes.<sup>38</sup> He suggested that worker control could be established gradually over time, and cited a CUPE strike in which workers were able to guarantee no layoffs over the course of the contract as an example of the types of demands that workers should be making to obtain more say in management.<sup>39</sup> Moreover,

<sup>33</sup> John Bullen, "The Ontario Waffle and the Struggle for an Independent Socialist Canada: Conflict within the NDP," *Canadian Historical Review* 64, (1983): 209.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>35</sup> Bryan Palmer, *Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour 1800-1991*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), 344, 345.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 344-45.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 344-45.

<sup>38</sup> Beckerman, 16.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

he argued that workers should move beyond legal strike actions as their sole mode of resistance, and ought to employ more creative tactics such as sit-ins.<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, CUPE leadership did not just allow its representatives to pay lip service to New Left concepts, but actually attempted to put these ideas into practice. In the early 1970s, during a labour dispute with the University of Toronto in which CUPE was attempting to organize non-unionized support staff, CUPE released a document critiquing the university administration's management style in which they explicitly used New Left ideas, terminology, and demands. First, CUPE quoted the university's New Left student union's definition of education, which they argued should "socially and intellectually liberat[e] young people so that they critically analyse, assess, cope with, and transform their environment and the environment of their society."<sup>41</sup> They also directly called for industrial democracy by criticizing the "arbitrary and authoritarian" workplace management, and argued that all workers should have a significant say in the "day to day decisions which affect their working lives."<sup>42</sup> Unlike the UAW where New Left ideas were recognized but not endorsed, CUPE directly used New Left arguments in their official documents, and made the sorts of transformative demands that New Leftists such as Chris Trower and Andre Beckerman suggested that unions ought to make.

Though CUPE and their radicalism did face opposition within the CLC, their leaders largely stuck to their ideals (though they abandoned their initial nationalist inclinations), and this led to significant successes throughout the 1970s both in tangible wage gains and by fostering a broader sense of class consciousness.<sup>43</sup> In one publicized example, CUPE hospital workers in Toronto threatened an illegal wildcat strike in 1974 if they did not receive a wage increase of at least \$1.14 an hour.<sup>44</sup> After the workers refused to back down, the Ontario government eventually gave the employees a raise of \$1.50 an hour at the last minute.<sup>45</sup> The Toronto workers' militancy subsequently inspired waves of hospital workers in both Ontario and New Brunswick to demand increases with similar threats and in these instances too, the workers were able to obtain significant wage gains.<sup>46</sup> Robert Laxer writes that these workers were able to justify their

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>41</sup> "Brief to the commission on University government of the University of Toronto from the Canadian Union of Public Employees," 1971, Walter Reuther Library, UAW Region 7 Collection, box 14, file 8.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Laxer, *Canada's Unions*, (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1976), 133-34.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 226-27.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 228-232.

illegal actions to the public with appeals to a higher “social legitimacy.”<sup>47</sup> Certainly, this is an impressive feat, especially when one considers the moral precedence and popular support that bourgeois legality and ‘respectability’ often have within liberal capitalist societies.

In addition to influencing public sector unions, New Leftists in the early 1970s became directly involved in labour conflicts supporting independent unions unaffiliated with the CLC. For example, New Leftists built an alliance with the fledgling National Farmers Union, and helped to orchestrate a nationwide boycott of Kraft products after Kraft refused to collectively bargain with the farmers over dairy prices in 1971.<sup>48</sup> In Saskatchewan in particular, this resulted in a strong progressive social movement that brought together New Leftists, young workers, and farmers.<sup>49</sup> New Leftists were also involved in the independent Canadian Textile and Chemical Workers Union (CTCU) in fights for union recognition, and these disputes often involved markedly violent confrontations between New Leftists who joined workers on the picket lines and the police.<sup>50</sup> The New Left’s involvement in unions such as the CTCU led to mixed outcomes. The grueling 1971 strike at Texpack, for example, ended with a victory in which the workers obtained substantial wage increases and prevented lay-offs despite facing brutal intimidation from the company, police brutality, and numerous injunctions from the state throughout the strike.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, other strikes were unsuccessful, such as a similar 1972 conflict at Dare Cookies in Kitchener where the union voted to decertify immediately after their strike.<sup>52</sup>

Arguably the most publicized independent labour conflict involving the New Left came at Artistic Woodwork in Toronto in 1973, where the CTCU engaged in yet another strike over union recognition. Working with New Left students, the CTCU was able to gain wide support for their struggle largely because of Laura Sky’s National Film Board video that depicted police officers beating students, including women, on the Artistic picket lines.<sup>53</sup> Though the union eventually obtained recognition alongside wage gains and better working conditions, the victory was short lived, as replacement workers now outnumbered the original employees

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>48</sup> Marc Zwelling, “The Kraft Boycott,” *Canadian Dimension* 8, no. 4-5 (1972): 8-10; “Watch for These Labels,” Kraft boycott advertisement, *Canadian Dimension* 8, no. 4-5 (1972): 65.

<sup>49</sup> Milligan 106, 107.

<sup>50</sup> Joan Sangster, “Remembering Texpack: Nationalism, Internationalism, and Militancy in Canadian Unions in the 1970s,” *Studies in Political Economy* 78, (2006): 57-60.

<sup>51</sup> Marc Zwelling, “The Strike at Texpack’s Vanishing Plant,” *Canadian Dimension* 8, no. 1 (1971): 9-11.

<sup>52</sup> “Dare Workers Vote to Dislodge Brewery Union,” *Globe and Mail*, 1 February, 1974, page 2.

<sup>53</sup> Milligan, 163-64.

and voted for decertification two years later.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, Ian Milligan still sees Artistic as a “pyrrhic victory,” because it showed that there was a real potential for a more idealistic independent labour movement outside of CLC bureaucracy, and because many of the students who participated in the strike were galvanized by their experiences and went on to play significant progressive roles as activists, academics, and politicians, including writer Rick Salutin and former federal NDP leader Jack Layton.<sup>55</sup> Though these independent union struggles did obtain victories at times, it would be inaccurate to argue that these particular independent unions in English Canada left a truly lasting influence on the broader Canadian labour movement as a whole.

While CUPE may have been able to obtain impressive wage gains and inspire larger waves of militancy at times, and the smaller independent unions may have attained unlikely (albeit small) victories, the most impressive manifestation of New Left politics in the Canadian labour movement was the Quebec Common Front during the 1970s. Both independent from the CLC and predominantly representing public sector workers, the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CNTU or CSN), Quebec Federation of Labour (QFL or FTQ), and Quebec Teachers’ Corporation (QTC or CEQ) united and formed the Common Front in 1971. These unions sought to radically transform not only their workplaces, but Canadian society as a whole based upon the New Left principles expressed in their manifestoes. These documents contained detailed Marxist critiques of the capitalist system in general, and political-economic histories of the development of capitalism in Quebec.<sup>56</sup> Much of this critique was framed in the language of anti-imperialism, and focused on foreign and Anglo-Canadian domination of the Quebec economy while mirroring New Left enthusiasm for national liberation movements in the then-Third World.<sup>57</sup>

Like other New Left-influenced documents, the manifestoes emphasized workers’ control and opposed mainstream unionism’s bureaucracies. The CSN’s manifesto, for example, argues that the main reason for capitalism’s failings and workers’ suffering is that “workers are not the owners of the factories in which they work. It’s the same situation in agriculture, where farmers are at the mercy of middle-men who manipulate markets and production.”<sup>58</sup> Similarly, the CEQ manifesto urges workers to move

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 165, 167-171.

<sup>56</sup> The CSN, CTQ, and FTQ manifestoes all followed a similar formula in this regard. Each is contained in *Quebec: Only the Beginning, The Manifestoes of the Common Front*, edited by Daniel Drache, (Toronto: New Press, 1972).

<sup>57</sup> These arguments are also found throughout each manifesto in *Quebec: Only the Beginning*.  
<sup>58</sup> “Its Up to Us, CSN Manifesto,” in *Quebec: Only the Beginning, The Manifestoes of the Common Front*, edited by Daniel Drache, (Toronto: New Press, 1972): 50.

beyond collective bargaining as the sole arena for class struggle, arguing that workers' must pursue "new modes of action" to ensure that the labour movement does not "degenerate into bureaucracy and undergo bourgeoisification."<sup>59</sup> Though they were drawing from the same New Left influences, these Common Front manifestoes were much more intense, immediate, and detailed than the demands that CUPE was making in hospitals, offices, and universities in English Canada.

By employing New Left theory and praxis, The Common Front was successful in spawning a larger left social movement and a broader sense of solidarity amongst Quebec's working people. Most impressively, 210 000 Common Front members triggered a general strike on April 11, 1972.<sup>60</sup> When the leaders of the Common Front were arrested for this and the Common Front workers were ordered back to work, 300 000 workers engaged in another illegal wildcat strike in May, and this larger strike included occupations of factories and radio stations.<sup>61</sup> The Common Front engaged in similar action in conflicts with the Quebec government in 1976 and 1979. In each case, the Common Front obtained significant gains for its workers despite government repression and back to work legislation. Large wage increases included a 23% increase in the 1973 contract, and 43% in both the 1976 and 1980 contracts.<sup>62</sup> In addition to large wage gains, the Common Front obtained other important gains for its workers during this period, including paid maternity leave, disability insurance, pensions, and guaranteed paid vacations.<sup>63</sup> The Common Front's New Left influenced labour conflicts which involved mass protests, general strikes, and large-scale occupations were unparalleled in English Canada during the same period. Because of their success at both stimulating a broader social movement and obtaining tangible gains for workers, these conflicts left an important legacy of class struggle in Quebec public sector unions, reflected by the Common Front's present day mass strikes and protests against neoliberal austerity policies.

In both the independent and public sector unions, women often played an important role in bringing New Left radicalism to the forefront, and this suggests that demographic differences may be another reason why New Left ideas and tactics flourished in these unions but not others. By the early 1970s, women made up a significantly larger proportion of the workforce in

<sup>59</sup>. "Phase One, CEQ Manifesto," in *Quebec: Only the Beginning, The Manifestoes of the Common Front*, edited by Daniel Drache, (Toronto: New Press, 1972): 100.

<sup>60</sup>. Jacques Rouillard, *Une Histoire du Syndicalisme Enseignant: De l'idée à l'action*, (Quebec City: University of Quebec Press, 2012): 131.

<sup>61</sup>. *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>62</sup>. *Ibid.*, 148-49.

<sup>63</sup>. *Ibid.*, 148-49.

the public sector than in the private sector, and the women who were in the private sector were often attracted to independent unions which tended to be more sympathetic to women's issues than the larger CLC affiliated unions like the UAW.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, women were better able to obtain leadership positions in these unions, with 28% of CUPE locals having women presidents in 1975, many of whom were quite militant.<sup>65</sup> Judy Darcy, for example, was a New Leftist member of CUPE who was also involved at the Artistic strike, and later became CUPE's national president.<sup>66</sup>

Women workers like Darcy may have been more attracted to New Left ideas because women still faced a much larger degree of discrimination both in the workplace and within mainstream labour organizations during this period, and therefore had a greater sense of urgency for transformative change than their male counterparts. Joan Sangster's research supports this hypothesis, and writes that many of the women involved in the labour movement at this time were influenced by New Left ideas for such reasons.<sup>67</sup> In a specific example, Julia Smith shows how New Left women created the independent socialist-feminist Service, Office, and Retail Workers Union of Canada (SORWUC) specifically to create an "entirely different kind of union" outside of the male dominated and reform focused CLC.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, Ian McKay writes that by the 1980s, socialist-feminists (many of whom came out of the New Left) "revolutionized" the Canadian labour movement, and were far more influential than their contemporaries in other North Atlantic countries.<sup>69</sup> Though it is important not to dismiss the aforementioned differences in leadership between unions as a main factor for the varying degrees to which New Left radicalism was able to thrive, these demographic differences seem to have been quite important as well, and in fact may have influenced the leadership differences.

Ultimately, the New Left in the 1960s and 1970s had an uneven, mixed impact on the Canadian labour movement. While bureaucrats in the CLC and some of its larger affiliated unions like the UAW eventually scorned New Leftists and their radicalism, public sector unions and independent unions embraced the New Left, often at the behest of women workers. In these unions, militancy coupled with transformative demands that went beyond wage increases resulted in notable successes throughout the period, most prominently for the Common Front in Quebec. The Common

<sup>64</sup> Joan Sangster, "Radical Ruptures: Feminism, Labor, and the Left in the Long Sixties in Canada," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 40, no. 1 (2010): 7-9.

<sup>65</sup> Laxer, 128.

<sup>66</sup> Milligan, 170.

<sup>67</sup> Sangster, "Radical Ruptures," 5-9.

<sup>68</sup> Julia Smith, "An "entirely different" kind of union: the Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada (SORWUC), 1972-1986," *Labour/Le Travail* 73, (2014): 23, 38-40.

<sup>69</sup> McKay, 207-209.

Front's legacy is important for Canadian public sector workers in the age of neoliberalism, where back-to work legislation is still as prominent as ever. Additionally, the fact that even small independent unions during this period met success at times remains a glimmer of hope for labour activists who remain disenchanted by present-day business unionism and envision a reinvigorated grassroots labour movement from below. Certainly, there is still much to learn from the New Left labour struggles in this period, and more research needs to be done on both these various radical unions and the specific conflicts that they were involved with.

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